‘My Life is like the Summer Rose’ Maurizio Tosi e l’Archeologia come modo di vivere

Papers in honour of Maurizio Tosi for his 70th birthday

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Table of Conteins

A NEW SMALL INSCRIBED CUBOID INCENSE BURNER FROM YEMEN

Mohammed MARAQTEN
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In antiquity, South Arabia was well-known as “the land of the incense” (Müller 1976: 124ff. and Groom 2002: 88-94). Incense was mainly produced in Dhofār, Oman (Zarins 2001: 52-97). Incense burners are found in the ancient Near East from ca. the middle of the second millennium onwards. Several kinds of incense are common, among them frankincense and myrrh. These were of great importance not only to ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Levant, but also to the Greek and Roman world (McLaughlin 2010: 61-81). These types of incense became important exports along the so-called incense route between South Arabia and the Levant (Müller 1978: 722-734, Young 2001: 81-122). In addition to the actual incense burners discovered, their images can also be seen on seals and reliefs (i.e. YM 386, Simpson 2002: no. 99).

INSCRIBED ALTARS FOR BURNING INCENSE

Among the cultic objects and cultic places in ancient South Arabia we have dozens of altars where incense was presumably burnt. In addition to the more elaborate altars associated with temple courtyards, there is good evidence for inscribed altars. One type is described as, *m̲dbḥ*, *m̲dbḥt* “slaughter altars”. The inscriptions on them record the dedicators, the specific deities the altars were consecrated to, and information about the blood slaughter itself - (*m̲dbḥ*, *m̲dbḥt*). These altars were presumably moved from place to place and formed part of the temple’s cultic equipment. It seems the several known types of altars were not only used for ritual slaughter, but also for receiving libations and other offerings, such as first fruits of the harvest (like grain), and incense. (Ryckmans 1993: 355-380, Maraqten: 1994: 160-177, Sedov 2005: 65-69).

INSCRIBED INCENSE BURNERS

Archaeological discoveries in Arabia, particularly over the last three decades, have yielded good artifactual evidence concerning the use of incense burners in pre-Islamic Arabian cultures. We now know of several different types of incense burners and even burners inscribed with the South Arabian script.

Like inscribed altars, inscribed incense burners are of great importance since they give us additional historical information, not only personal names - those who dedicated the items - but also the names of the deities to whom these incense burners were consecrated. We also know the material the burners were made from (Maraqten 1994: 160-177). We have good evidence for the dedication of several types of incense burners mentioned by their names and presented to various deities. The most common are the *mqṭr*-incense burner and the *mfḥm*-incense burner (Maraqten 1994: 165,168). These were restricted to incense offerings. No doubt, in addition to frankincense and myrrh, resins and spices extracted from various plants were burnt as incense in ancient South Arabia to produce the sweet smell favored by the deities. We also have good evidence for incense being part of the daily cult of offering. For instance, the term used in Minaic inscriptions *mṯʻy,* is mentioned several times as a dedication to the Minaean national god Wadd (*mṯʻyt wdm*: RES 2771, 2778 and 2929, *mṯʻy wd* in: RES 2789 and 2975). It appears that the use of aromatic essences, incense and myrrh, as well as cosmetics or *materia medica*, was both important in temple ritual, and it seems to have been common in everyday life (Müller 1976: 125).

SMALL INSCRIBED CUBOID INCENSE BURNERS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

This type is very important because the burners are inscribed in South Arabian letters on one or more of their sides with the names of incense or perfume such as *ḍrw*, *ldn, lbny* etc. (Antonini 1988: 133-141, Maraqten 1994: 170f.). In addition to *lbn* “frankincense” and *ʾmrr* (pl.) “myrrh” representing the most valuable and expensive aromatic materials (Müller 1978: 734-737, 1997: 193-195, 197, Groom 2002: 88-94, McLaughlin 2010: 179-182), we also have gums and resins from different plants and trees such as bdellium, used as incense.

The different kinds of incense mentioned on these cuboid incense burners are primarily the local names for incense and perfumes used by the people of ancient South Arabia. Most of the incense names - *ḍrw, ldn,* etc. - are often found inscribed on incense burners. However, a recently-published small cuboid incense burner from the Museum of the University of Ṣanʻāʾ is inscribed on four sides and bears the inscription: *qṭr ḍrw ʾbm rnd* (A-20-628). The names of two kinds of aromatic incense, *qṭr* and *ʾbm*, occur here for the first time in ancient South Arabian inscriptions: The term *qṭr* relates to a type of incense burner called *mqṭr*. This type of incense altar seems to have been used specifically for the aromatic type of incense - *qṭr* (Maraqten 1994: 165f, cf. Biblical Hebrew

qeṭōrœt Müller 1976: 125, Heger 1997: 24-47, 88-96). The aromatic name *ʾbm* is unknown. Although this type of small incense burners was used in temples, it seems it was primarily employed for secular purposes - in everyday life for personal or festive use, and for the worship of household deities. Apparently the aromatic materials inscribed on the small cuboid incense burners were used only in these vessels.

The texts incised on inscribed cuboid incense burners have been collected and studied by A. Grohmann (1922: 110-156), F. Bron (1986: 131-134), W.W. Müller (1997: 193-210) and A. Sima (2000: 265-267). Some South Arabian aromatic terms occur in the compendium of New Babylonian aromatic names (Jursa 2009: 157-166).

More than fifty examples of inscribed cuboid incense burners have been discovered in South Arabia, often in unregulated excavation, therefore it is difficult to date them based on provenance or paleography.

The language of the inscriptions and the linguistic categories mentioned below are uncertain. However, some inscriptions can be dated to the beginning of the first millennium BCE. Such small inscribed incense burners continued in use over the entire history of South Arabia up to the eve of Islam (Antonini 1988: 133-141, Maraqten 1994: 170f., Hassell 2002: 157–192, Simpson 2002: 95-98) and even over the Islamic period (Le Maguer 2011: 173-186).

Identification of the numerous types of aromatics burnt as incense is still very problematic and needs more investigation. The Sabaic Dictionary (Beeston et al. 1982) provides no useful etymology. Although frankincense and Myrrh were commercialized, many other aromatics were not. However, in the three lines inscribed on a palm leaf-stalk from the collection of the National Museum of Ṣanʿāʾ which contains a prize list, we have the aromatic name *rndm* in addition to *kndrm* "frankincense". Hitherto, *rndm* is only known from engraved cuboid incense burners. On the palm-leaf stock the term *kndrm* (Arabic *kundur*) is attested for the first time in ancient south Arabian inscriptions (YM 10936 = Faq'as 13, Faqʿas 2013: 88). The Arabic name *kundur* is used in Arabic Classical sources as a synonym for *lubān* "frankincense" (Müller 1978: 707f.).

MṢ 2 (MARAQTEN ṢANʿĀʾ 2)

A unique type of inscribed incense burner that can be described as cuboid is the subject of this paper. This object is from a private collection in Ṣanʿāʾ. Its provenance is unknown, but the owner believes it came from the Yemeni Jawf. I am grateful to him for allowing me to publish it. The illustrations are mine.

This small carved limestone cuboid incense burner is carefully finished on the inside. The upper surface is hollowed-out and the base is supported by four short square legs, one broken off. It is incised in South Arabian script on each of its four sides. It is difficult to determine the language of this inscription; it could be Sabaic or Minaic and possibly dated to the 4th or 3rd century BCE. The inscription reads: *ldn qs¹ṭ lbny qnw.* Three of the aromatic terms mentioned, namely, *ldn, qs¹ṭ,* and *lbny,* are known from other inscriptions, but *qnw* is attested here for the first time.

LDN (Fig. 1)

This name of this kind of aromatic is frequently engraved on burners (CIH 686, 687, 689, 690; Ra 101 = RES 4035; RES 4681 = Ra 100; Ja 385 = CSAI I, 1099) and is known in Classical Arabic sources as *ladanum*, Arabic *lāḏan*. It is the fragrant gum of *Cistus ladaniferus* and possibly other kinds of *Cistaceae* (Müller 1997: 204f., Sima 2000: 273; *Dioscurides triumphans*, 149–54, I 66; Duke 2008: 113-115; Jursa 2009: 162).

QS¹Ṭ (Fig. 2)

This kind of aromatic is called *costus*, *Saussurea costus* (Arabic *qusṭ*): The name has been found incised on several incense burners (CIH 682, 683, 684, 685, 689, Ra 101 = RES 4035, RES 3853, RES 4681 = Ra 100, RES 4255 = CSAI I, 1095, Ja 397 = CSAI I, 1100, UAM 214, Y.86.BAR/13). The aromatic was well-known in antiquity and during the Islamic period (Grohmann 1922: 117, Müller 1997: 2004, Sima 2000: 275f., Dietrich, *Dioscurides triumphans*, 149-54, I 66, cf. also Khare 2007: 586f.).



Fig. 1. LDN.



Fig. 2. QS¹Ṭ.

LBNY (Fig. 3)

Note that the term *lbny* "resin of storax", (Arabic *lubnā*, Biblical Hebrew *libnœ*) should not be understood as *lbn* "Frankincense" (Müller 1976: 124-127, 1997: 207). These are two different kinds of incense. The term *lbny,* attested several times incised on small incense burners, (CIAS C 64/s 9/97.12 n° 2 = RES 4255 = CSAI I, 1095, YM 467 = CIAS I 275-278, UAM 214) apparently means the resin of the *Liquidambar orientalis*, a tree widespread in the eastern Mediterranean region (Sima 2000: 271, Dietrich, *Dioscurides triumphans*, 111, I 28, Zohary 1982: 118). This meaning is preferred to the resin of the storax tree, *Styrax officinalis* or the storax tree itself, Arabic *ʾusṭarak mīʿah* (Müller 1997: 207, Duke 2008: 447-449).

QNW (Fig. 4)

The term *qnw* describes an aromatic used as incense and is attested here for the first time in South Arabia. *Qnw* is the basic term for all types of, "reed, stalk, cane", in several Semitic languages: Apparently *qnw* relates to the Akkadian *qanû, qanû ṭābū* "Süßrohr" (AHw, 898a, Jursa 2009: 163f.), "sweet reed" (CAD Q 88b) and the Biblical Hebrew *qāneh* "spice reed" (LXX, *kalamos*; Vulgate, *fistula*), *qāneh haṭṭōb* "the precious reed" (Koehler /Baumgartner 2001: 1113) and the Arabic *qanā* "reed" as well as the Syriac *qanyā* (Sokoloff 2009: 1383f.). Possibly the *qāneh haṭṭōb* imported from Sabaʾ in Jerimiah 6, 20 was similar to the *qnw* of our text.



Fig. 3. LBNY.

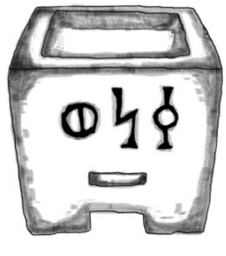


Fig. 4. QNW.

Apparently the term *qnw* relates to the type of aromatic hitherto known from South Arabian inscriptions as *ṭyb* "gold, a precious incense" or *ṭybʾl* "precious incense of the (god) ʾĪl", which represents a valuable kind of incense and has been identified as the Arabic *ṭīb al-ʿArab* or *iḏḫir*, camel grass, Cymbopogon (Andropogon) Schoenanthus (Müller 1997: 205f., Sima 2000: 278, Crone 1987: 57-59). *Iḏḫir* is also known as *mḥāḥ* in Yemeni Arabic (Provençal 2010: 57).

Apparently the ancient Egyptian term *ḳni,* identified by Manniche (Manniche 1999: 68) as *acorus calamus* could also be relevant to the South Arabian *qnw.* Moreover, the *qnʾ zkʾ* "aromatic reed" in Official Aramaic (Hoftijzer/ Jongeling 1996: 1014) might be similar to *qnw*.

It seems difficult to distinguish between the different types of aromatics designated by the Semitic term *qny/qnw* since the term *qāneh* is identified in Greek as *kalamos* in the LXX, and *fistula* in the Vulgate (Lamberty-Zielinski 1993: 71-78).

It has been suggested that *Acorus calamus* may corresponds to the Biblical Hebrew *qāneh bōśem* (cf. Exod 30:23, Grohmann 1922: 116f., Müller 1997: 206f., Sima 2000: 274). It is still uncertain which plant corresponds exactly to *qāneh bōśem* (Ex 30, 23). According to M. Zohary, it is one of the species of *Cymbopogon* (*Cymbopogon martinii,* still cultivated in India, source of palmarosa oil; *Cymbopogon schoenanthus* or "camel grass", Cymbopogon citratus, "West-Indian lemon grass" (Zohary 1982: 196). *Qāneh bōśem* can be compared with the Syrian *qanyā ḏ-besme* (Sokoloff 2009: 165f., 1113f.). The Minaic *qlymt* (*calamus aromatic*, *acorus calamus* = calamus odoratus) is known from ancient South Arabia (M 338/1) and has been identified as the Arabic *qaṣab al-ḏarīra*, *qaṣab al-ṭīb* or *al-waǧǧ* (Lane VII, 2529, Grohmann 1922: 116f., Müller 1997: 206-7, Sima 2000: 274). There is a problem in relating *qnw* to the Minaic word *qlymt*. This term is mentioned in a Minaic inscription engraved on the sarcophagi of a Minaean merchant named Zaydʾīl. He wrote he imported *ʾmrr* (plural of *mrr*) "*myrrh*" and *qylmt*, "different sorts of aromatic calamus" for the temples of the gods of Egypt (M 338/1).

This term, only attested in its plural form, was reconstructed by W.W. Müller as **qalām* and cannot be of Greek origin (Müller 1997: 207). Both terms designate two different types of aromatics.

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